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Thailand's Military: The Power Brokers' Role in Transition

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An Intelligence Assessment

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This paper was prepared by Office of East Asian Analysis. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Southeast Asia Division,

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Key Judgments

Information available as of 16 September 1985 was used in this report.

The Thai military's dominant role in domestic affairs—which has lasted for 50 years—has been questioned as never before over the past decade. The search for a middle way between dictatorship and parliamentary government has accelerated since Prime Minister Prem came into office in 1980. Prem, himself a retired Army general, and civilian leaders strengthened their control of the Cabinet and the National Assembly by capitalizing on weak military leadership and the expiration in 1983 of constitutional provisions that had facilitated continued military predominance in the political arena.

Because the Prime Minister retains the support of the National Assembly, the palace, and key senior Army officers, we believe any military efforts to reverse this trend—such as the abortive coup attempt in September 1985—are likely to be unsuccessful. As long as Prem remains in office (and, barring ill health, we believe his chances of completing his term in 1987 are generally good), he and his civilian allies probably will continue to gain power at the Army's expense. The issue that is most likely to derail this gradual accumulation of civilian power, in our judgment, is the government's handling of the economy; economic growth must be balanced with austerity measures designed to improve Thailand's balance of payments.

After 1987, however, the civilians' prospects will become less certain. The institutional framework for civilian political participation—the National Assembly, political parties, and the Constitution—remains flimsy, and much will depend on who succeeds Prem as Prime Minister. Economic or political shocks such as a drastic decline in growth rates (averaging 5.5 percent annually since 1980) or a national security crisis would probably result in a resurgence of military political power. The status of military efforts to restore the constitutional privileges that lapsed in 1983 will provide the clearest indication of the direction in which the new mixed military-civilian system is moving.

Changes in military-civilian relations, combined with the emergence of a new generation of nationalistic Thai leaders, could have some implications for Thailand's bilateral relations with the United States:

- Future Thai leaders may become less responsive to US interests in their effort to balance competing demands from military and civilian supporters.

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- Rising trade tensions between Bangkok and Washington; influential civilians in charge of economic policy often do not see eye to eye with US policymakers.
- US security and trade policies in the region are increasingly questioned by the new generation of officers, politicians, and policymakers.

A combination of these factors could result in a more distant relationship marked by criticism of the United States by Thai leaders at home and reduced Thai willingness to support US positions in international forums.

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Civilian-Military Relations in Flux

Thailand's military has often been called the nation's largest and best-organized political party. Since 1932, when it participated in overthrowing the absolute monarchy, the Royal Thai Army [1] has led Thailand through 16 coups or coup attempts and 13 constitutions. Although governing has largely been left to a well-developed civilian bureaucracy, Army leaders have preserved control by reserving the top slots in the civil administration for themselves. The military has undercut opponents by co-opting or manipulating them, or has resorted to force.

Until the 1973 student revolt, few observers believed that Army political dominance could be shaken, and the 1976 coup that returned Thailand to military rule appeared to validate this belief. Nevertheless, since 1976 Army preeminence has been weakened, in our judgment, as civilians and their allies have made modest, but nonetheless significant, gains in government. In fact, the military has received several major political rebuffs in the past two years.

Our interpretation of recent developments is not accepted by all Some argue that no real erosion of the military's political power has occurred and that the Army's poor leadership in national affairs is largely responsible for apparent gains by civilian policymakers and politicians. They maintain that the political gains by civilians are insignificant because the Army retains enormous tools of influence in its veto in national security affairs and its virtual monopoly on political leadership.[2]

[1] The words "Army" or "RTA" and "military" are used interchangeably in this paper, with the understanding that the Army, by controlling personnel and funding policies, dominates the other services, and generally directs any political initiatives.

A Pattern of Military Dominance

Early Period (1932-57). *After the absolute monarchy was overthrown in 1932, eight coups or revolts disrupted the process of institutionalizing the parliamentary government. Field Marshal Phibun emerged as the dominant military and political figure. There was a brief period of civilian government from 1944 to 1948; Phibun returned to office until 1957, when Army Commander in Chief Sridhi overthrew him. Phibun's tenure as prime minister totaled nearly 15 years.*

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Sridhi and Heirs (1957-73). *Sridhi's route to power—via all the important Bangkok combat units—and his wheeling and dealing to further his political and financial power remain a model against which the Thai measure later military leaders. At his death in 1963, the government remained in the hands of his military proteges, Thanom and Praphat. They retained power until 1973, when gross corruption, discontent in the Army officer corps, and student-led protests forced their departure.*

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Searching for a Middle Way (Post-1973). *The military ended three turbulent years of democracy with a coup in October 1976. In 1977, after a year of rule by a rightist civilian, the military—led by General Kriangsak—stepped in again. Kriangsak promulgated a new constitution and became prime minister in 1978. Mounting criticism of his economic policies and loss of military support in 1980, however, forced Kriangsak to resign in favor of General Prem, then Army Commander in Chief. Since becoming Prime Minister, Prem has survived two coup attempts (in April 1981 and September 1985) and a parliamentary crisis (in 1983).*

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Nevertheless, we are convinced that change is occurring in the Thai political system. How fast and how far reaching this change will be is unclear, but we believe the 1950s style of absolute dictatorship has evolved into a more complex—and open—political system in which politicians, policymakers, and military men jockey for position and test the tolerance of their opponents. If change continues in this direction and takes hold—and at this point we are not certain it will—Thai political processes will be very different by 1990, and Thailand's relations with the United States could become less close.

Civilians Gain Ground

Although the military remains a powerful voice in government, we believe several factors, including Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanonda's assumption of office in 1980, have allowed other participants—politicians, Cabinet appointees, and Prem himself—to encroach on traditionally military preserves. The most significant factor, in our opinion, was the expiration in 1983 of transitional clauses in the 1978 Constitution, which gave civilians stronger control of the Cabinet and the National Assembly. The military lost certain key tools of domination:

- Senators (royal appointees who are mostly retired and active-duty officers) could no longer vote on motions of no confidence and the national budget.
- Senate power to kill bills passed by the elected lower house was revoked.
- Active-duty officers and government officials were no longer allowed to hold Cabinet-level posts.

At the same time, a trend toward better qualified and disciplined politicians has weakened military justifications for direct intervention, according to US diplomats. They report that a greater number of educated Thai professionals are now entering parliamentary politics, and the Social Action and Democrat Parties in particular have attracted a number of younger, well-educated politicians. Since 1983, so-called "prostitute parliamentarians," who switched parties at will for financial or political rewards, have been hampered by new requirements that force them to wait to change party affiliation until the next general election (held every four years) or face the loss of their seat. In recent years, US diplomats and other observers have suggested that party discipline, a chronic problem for party leaders, also appears to have increased in the largest coalition parties, such as the Social Action Party and the Democrat Party, as party whips and coalition leaders proved they could deliver majority

The Unresolved Constitutional Question

Since the expiration of the constitutional provisional clauses in 1983, the military has periodically tried to restore them. Most of the pressure has concentrated on restoring clauses that allowed military officers to enter the Cabinet—a traditional route to the premiership. 25X1

Nevertheless, the military, under Arthit's leadership, has twice failed to gain National Assembly approval for the amendments. After losing the final vote in 1983 by a small margin, Arthit forced Prem to call new parliamentary elections—in which military-allied parties did poorly. The issue came up again in mid-1984, but pressure from the palace, Prem's allies in the coalition parties, and within the Army, convinced Arthit to let the matter drop. Although numerous political blunders by Arthit undercut his efforts, we also think unexpected resistance in the elected lower house also played a significant role. 25X1 25X1

Since then the issue has simmered on the back burner. Many politicians remain opposed to restoring the lost constitutional prerogatives, but there are also indications that party leaders—even some within Prem's coalition—might compromise in hopes of being included in a future military government. One proposed solution would be to allow military men and bureaucrats already appointed to the Senate to serve in the Cabinet as well. We expect renewed attempts to amend the Constitution before 1987—when Lieutenant General Pichtr of the 1st Army will probably make a play to succeed Prem as prime minister. If enacted, the amendments would wipe out many of the recent gains by civilians. 25X1 25X1

Satire on Prem's intermittent difficulties with civilian coalition partners. The Prime Minister arrives at Government House to find his Cabinet ministers battered and bruised from quarreling.

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votes on contentious issues, including constitutional amendments opposed by the Army, and opposition party attempts to pass no-confidence motions against the government. In our judgment, the Social Action Party and the Democrats have particularly benefited from their leaders' shrewdness and skill in political infighting. For example, they have used legislative procedures to deflect the opposition party's motions against the ruling coalition.[3]

In addition, the chronic problems of factionalism and stalling in the Cabinet appear to have lessened, according to US diplomats. Friction among the coalition partners in Prem's government has been greatly reduced because of the decision in 1983 to appoint ministers and deputy ministers from the same party to each ministry, according to most observers. Largely as a result of that policy, the present coalition has generally refrained from the public quarreling among coalition parties that led to the downfall of Prem's first two cabinets. Furthermore,

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the Prime Minister launched a lobbying campaign in July to convince military senators not to vote against an amendment to the election law opposed by certain powerful Army officers. US Embassy also report that the Cabinet-level parliamentary coordinating committee is generally successful in smoothing out disagreements among the coalition parties before government bills are voted on in the National Assembly.

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The composition of the Cabinet itself and the relative influence among Cabinet members also show a decided shift, accelerating after 1983, to apolitical and

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[3] Several "lowpoints" were also evident during the legislative session that ended in July, underscoring how far the National Assembly and parliamentarians are from political maturity. They include the public refusal by one minister to allow an official to testify when summoned, the shenanigans of certain disreputable politicians, and the Cabinet's refusal to authorize radiobroadcasts of debate in the elected House of Representatives.

technocratic appointees.[4] In our opinion, there are two main reasons for this. Military participation in the Cabinet generally has been declining over the past 10 to 15 years. From 1932 to 1969, according to figures quoted by a Thai academic, military and police officers held an average of 43 percent of the posts in each Cabinet. This share dropped to about 27 percent in 1972-77. Since the expiration of the Constitution's transitional clauses in 1983, active-duty officers and civil servants have been barred from Cabinet posts.[5]

The other reason for the shift toward technocratic and apolitical appointees is Prem's personal relationships with certain trusted politicians, nonpartisan advisers, and ministers. These individuals have gained policy-making power. Social Action Party chief Kukrit and Democrat Party leader Bhichai have become particularly close to the Prime Minister, and that he often turns to them for advice and support, as he did during last year's currency devaluation. We believe Prem also realizes that he needs their support to maintain his parliamentary constituency. For instance, US diplomats report that, after initially opposing the idea, Prem decided to support a recent election amendment sponsored by the Social Action Party—despite military opposition—rather than break with his largest coalition partner.

Prem's relations with technocratic ministers and advisers follow a similar pattern, probably best exemplified by his support for Finance Minister Sommai. In our opinion, Prem's trust in Sommai and his economic team was underscored by his decision to retain the Finance Minister despite the September 1985 coup attempt and several widely unpopular decisions. These included Sommai's dismissal of the central bank

[4] Under the 1978 Constitution, Cabinet ministers—including the prime minister—need not be elected members of the National Assembly. Instead, the Cabinet is appointed by the monarch and approved by the president of the National Assembly.

[5] Prem, the ministers of foreign affairs and the interior, and two out of four deputy prime ministers are retired military men, however.

The Devaluation

When the Prem government devalued the currency in November 1984, Army Commander Arthit reacted by publicly challenging the move. In a stinging television address, Arthit called for the removal of Finance Minister Sommai and the restoration of the old exchange rate; he also threatened to withdraw his backing from the government.

Encouraged by senior officers, railway workers went on strike, and opposition politicians attempted to reconvene the National Assembly to debate the devaluation.

The challenge fell flat, however, as Arthit found little support for a coup, even among his associates.

Prem promised to compensate the military budget in part for losses caused by the devaluation, but refused to consider any other changes. Following the agreement between Prem and Arthit, the railway strike and the move to reopen the National Assembly both crumbled.

Crucial to Prem's victory were royal backing, the support of his coalition, and disunity within the Army. The royal family showed its support by appearing with Prem in public. Despite misgivings, coalition leaders launched a public relations campaign supporting the devaluation. Splits within the military over the proper action to take were also obvious. Arthit's poor choice of issue and tactics contributed to his defeat on this question, in our judgment.

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governor in a policy dispute in September 1984, the currency devaluation later that year, and the subsequent imposition of: ceilings on foreign borrowing, austerity measures, and small cuts in the military budget.[6] In spite of Sommai's controversial policies, he remains the foremost economic policymaker in the Cabinet, [redacted]

The Military Falters

Military political influence has been hampered in recent years by relatively weak Army leadership and disunity among officers. [redacted] recent Army commanders in chief have lacked political sophistication and charisma. In addition, the shorter tenure of recent Army commanders in chief has weakened their power within the officer corps. Since 1973, tenure of Army commanders in chief has dropped to an average of two years, compared with Field Marshal Sridhi, who held the post for nearly nine years (from 1954 to 1963), as did his successor Praphat. Although the present commander in chief, General Arthit Kamlang-ek, has remained in office longer than any other Army chief since the mid-1970s (while also acting as Supreme Commander of Armed Forces, a position equivalent to the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff), he will have had only four years in the top Army slot, if he retires as scheduled in September 1986. [redacted]

One result of the shorter tenure of Army commanders in chief, we believe, is that competition for the top post and the relative weakness of incumbent Army leaders has led to increased factional feuding within the officer corps. Factionalism has long been part of Army politics in Thailand, but, in our opinion, the protracted dispute between members of two classes from the military academy—Class 7 (the Young Turks), graduated in 1960, and Class 5, graduated in 1958—suggests that Army leaders do not fully control the officer corps. This rivalry has persisted over several years, and it helped precipitate the coup attempts in April 1981 and September 1985. [redacted]

[redacted]

The F-16 Controversy

By mid-1984 the Air Force's proposed purchase of US F-16s had become a hotly debated public issue. Although senior Air Force and Army officers argued that the planes were needed to counter the Vietnamese threat, other officers believed that the F-16s were inappropriate for Thailand. Politicians and economic policy makers protested that the government could not afford the planes—especially after the government devalued the currency and imposed austerity measures in November. After several months of seesawing, military proponents of the deal convinced Prem to authorize the purchase early in 1985. [redacted]

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The Air Force's victory, however, was tempered; it had to reduce the number of planes from 16 to 12 and purchase them under a less desirable payment plan. According to the US Embassy, a ceiling on government-backed foreign borrowing and a committee of technocrats set up to enforce the ceiling precluded Air Force use of new foreign loans to pay for the aircraft. Obtaining more US FMS credits to finance the sale was also impossible. Thus, the Air Force had to settle for paying by installments over the next five years, which will probably tie up Air Force resources for several years, and will rule out further costly procurements in the near term. [redacted]

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What is clear is that the facade of political uniformity[7] in the RTA broke down after the Young Turks and another group, the Democratic Soldiers, came to the fore in the early 1980s. Although both groups are now in eclipse, their emergence indicated a new level of political awareness within the officer corps, and

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[7] Press interviews reveal that military officers generally share certain longheld attitudes toward politics. These include contempt for civilian politicians, populism with an authoritarian slant, loyalty to the throne, aversion to airing Army disputes in public, and general belief that national security requires the military to assume a prominent role in public affairs. [redacted]

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underscored continuing differences within the military about what its role in politics should be:

- The Young Turks argued that military involvement in politics detracted from the professionalism of the armed forces. Ironically, the Young Turks' disaffection with Prem's government led them to try to overthrow him. In April 1981, General Arthit, the royal family, and Class 5 rallied around the Prime Minister, and the Young Turks were defeated. The 1985 coup attempt by the remnants of this group met even broader opposition, according to US diplomats.

- The Democratic Soldiers, a group of mostly staff officers, who promoted the idea of a more open political system, have faded out of the news as they have retired or been moved to less influential positions. One general associated with this group, Gen. Han Linanon, last year resigned from the Army to work for the Democrat Party.

We also believe that many senior RTA officers have become less eager to use coups to resolve political differences.[8]

The failed coup attempt in 1981, in our opinion, appears to have had a restraining effect on some officers as well. Not only did the palace publicly disassociate itself from the coup, but the government deprived more than 30 of the participants of their commissions and pensions—an almost unprecedented punishment. We believe the lingering memories of the 1981 coup may have been partly responsible for the failure of the September 1985 revolt to gain significant support from the military.

[8] The attempted coup in September 1985, in our judgment, did not have the support of the majority of senior officers.

Furthermore, personality and personal political style have always been crucial in Thai politics, and the military has been unlucky in its recent leaders. Over the past two years, for example, the rivalry between Prem and Arthit has been at the core of military-civilian relations. In conflicts between the two men, the Army leader has generally lost out. Arthit's personality do not accord well with Thai social norms emphasizing self-restraint. In addition, he lacks judgment and has made politically costly gaffes: he unsuccessfully protested the devaluation in November 1984, and displayed an apparent lack of interest in the fighting along the Thai-Cambodian border in 1984-85.

On the other hand, Prem's increasing political abilities and nonconfrontational style improved his public image and underscored the contrast with Arthit. Prem's military background and his ties to influential officers generally keep the Army from viewing him as a threat, even when advice from his civilian allies leads him into conflict with the Army. Prem's palace connections also undercut Arthit.

In our opinion, the King probably views Prem's reputation for incorruptibility, his obedience to the palace, and his party connections as useful in maintaining Thailand's democratic image abroad.[9]

[9] In early 1985, Prem granted Arthit permission to postpone retirement for one year, until October 1986. Although Arthit had long agitated for a postponement, his political standing had been so weakened during 1984 that Prem granted his request only after Arthit had promised to support the government and to refrain from political meddling,

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The political rivalry between Prem and Arthit has overshadowed civilian-military relations for the past two years.

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Changing Public Attitudes

One of the most important factors affecting the political system, we believe, is the move over the past 20 years from an agrarian economy to a more industrialized one. This has been accompanied by the growth of a well-educated class involved in business, finance, and other white-collar occupations. This class apparently has greater skepticism about the Army's political role; recent nationwide media surveys indicated the public views military rule as neither inevitable nor positive. Although US diplomats report that businessmen and other conservative groups view continued stability as vital to economic growth, we believe they would probably find excessive political demands by the military destabilizing. Results of the parliamentary election in 1983 tend to confirm this view, for, following the military's unsuccessful attempt to amend the Constitution, political parties favoring the military's demands made a poor showing and failed to win enough seats to set up a right-center coalition government.

Not surprisingly, the urban elite appears to be increasing its role in political affairs. Businessmen, especially Sino-Thai merchants and bankers, have long been a part of the political scene, but traditionally they have bribed military officers, politicians, and bureaucrats to protect their interests while staying out of public view. Although this pattern continues, studies in Thailand indicated that, up to 1979, businessmen were forming a greater percentage of parliamentarians; we suspect the trend is continuing as professionals and businessmen assume the right to act politically in their own interests. For instance, one wealthy lawyer-politician told US diplomats that coups are now possible only in a crisis, and argued that it was no longer necessary for military men to

Selected Social Indicators for Thailand

	1960	1981	1982	1983
GNP per capita *(in US dollars)*	95 [a]			820 [b]
Enrollment in secondary education *(percentage of age group)* [c]	13		29	
Enrollment in tertiary education *(percentage of population aged 20 to 24)* [c]	2		22	
Newsprint consumption [d] *(kilograms per capita)*	0.7	2.29		

[a] Estimate in 1960 dollars. Based on *World Bank Tables,* Third Edition, p. 167.
[b] In 1983 dollars.
[c] Educational and GNP figures, *World Development Report 1985.*
[d] *UN Statistical Abstracts* for 1960 and 1982.

serve in the Cabinet and the National Assembly because well-qualified civilians were available. Remarks such as these, although optimistic, we believe emphasize the growing confidence of this urban class.

Looking Ahead

Prospects for continued civilian gains in the political arena are fairly good in the short term, in our judgment. Prem retains the backing of the parties, the palace, and senior military men. Barring ill health, we rate his chance of remaining in office until 1987 as generally good. Consequently, we believe the present Constitution is likely to survive intact until the end of Prem's term. Prem's unique position will probably protect his coalition allies and civilian ministers. As long as politicians refrain from direct attacks on the military or the monarchy, we believe their chances of avoiding a military backlash are good over the next two years.

The single most important issue likely to upset this balance during the next two years, in our judgment, is the government's handling of the economy. Economic growth is slowing from the rates of 5 to 6 percent a year reached in the early 1980s, and real growth this year will probably drop to 4.5 percent, according to the US Embassy. At the same time, balance-of-payments strains persist, and there is concern among government policymakers and international commercial bankers about the mounting debt service ratio—currently 27 percent, according to the US Embassy.[10] The attempted coup in September 1985 underscored the importance of economic issues in the civilian-military relationship and the willingness of some former Army officers to use economic problems as an excuse to seize power. We believe that Prem will have to take decisive steps, including potentially destabilizing Cabinet reshuffles or new budget austerity measures, to deal with the weakening economy and to forestall military efforts to use the issue against him.

After 1987, we believe prospects for continued civilian gains become less certain, largely because civilian political institutions remain weak. Although the present Constitution has allowed civilians to gain more power, Thai constitutions are generally short lived. Indeed, the National Assembly itself remains dependent on the executive branch for staffing and legal status, and the civil service provides support services to members. The Ministry of Interior rules on the legal standing of both members and parties. In the medium term, therefore, Prem's successor will largely determine the degree to which changed political attitudes and institutions will put down roots and take hold. The two men most often mentioned as future prime minister are:

- Pichtr Kullavanijya, currently Commander of the 1st Army, is a leading contender for the top Army slot in October 1987. Pichtr,

[10] Depressed international commodity markets have hurt Thailand's traditional exports such as rice, tapioca, sugar, corn, and rubber, which together account for about 50 percent of the country's export earnings. In addition, overseas markets in developed countries for many of Bangkok's manufactured exports—especially textiles—are increasingly threatened by import restrictions.

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Pichtr Kunlavanijya.

Chavalit Yongchaiyudt.

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If Pichtr becomes prime minister, we would expect him to try to restore the Army's lost political prerogatives.

- Chavalit Yongchaiyudt, recently promoted to Army chief of staff, is generally viewed as Pichtr's rival within the RTA. Intelligent and manipulative, Chavalit has announced that he intends to retire in two years and enter politics. As go-between for Prem and the National Assembly, Chavalit has extensive contacts with civilian politicians. He believes the military has a legitimate role in politics, but probably would allow civilian politicians and ministers a role similar to that granted by Prem.

Civilian hopefuls for prime minister, in our opinion, have little chance of rallying the support necessary to succeed Prem. Lacking civilian candidates for prime minister, however, Chavalit could be a compromise candidate if he retires from the Army as announced. Because of his network of contacts within the political parties and the military, Chavalit could assume a neutral status as a "civilianized" military man, much as Prem and Prem's predecessor Kriangsak did.[11] This type of prime minister is probably viable only if constitutional provisions continue to bar active-duty officers from assuming Cabinet posts, including the premiership. Otherwise, ambitious senior officers like Pichtr are likely to regain key posts in the Cabinet.

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The royal family's influence in this process will be critical. In our judgment, support for the present mixed civilian-military government comes more from Prem than from a palace decision to press for increased civilian political power. Given their past behavior, we believe their conservatism and desire to safeguard the dynasty would lead the King and Queen to choose a conservative, possibly even a reactionary, military leader over a civilian. Chances that the royal family will work for this outcome would greatly increase if the monarchy sees economic or political chaos threatening the nation or the throne.

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Signposts To Watch

We believe certain events would probably signal a sharp move back toward greater Army control of the political system even before 1987 and almost certainly after that:

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- Revision of the Constitution to allow military officers to hold Cabinet posts.

[11] Both Prem and Kriangsak became prime minister while on active duty and retired from the Army in office.

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Prem walking with Army Chief of Staff Chavalit. [redacted] *Chavalit and his allies from the Class 5 group of officers have formed one of the pillars of support for Prem's government.*

[redacted]

- Prolonged legislative stalemate in parliament or inability to form a coalition government.
- Breakdown in domestic order, caused by severe economic dislocation, or a national security crisis, such as actual war with Vietnam.
- A royal succession crisis.[12]

[redacted]

- Prem's sudden death or incapacitation, and the uncertainty caused by the lack of constitutional procedures for succession. [redacted] 25X1

Implications for the United States

The search by military men and other political actors for a middle way between dictatorship and parliamentary government is a new phenomenon in Thailand. Old rules of political conduct have been weakened, and civilians are bargaining with military men and testing the Army's political tolerance. If the process becomes too intense, it could bring about a return to the political polarization of the mid-1970s when civilian politicians and pressure groups, such as students and labor unions seeking to limit military political power, attacked the US-Thai relationship. [redacted] 25X1

In this evolving environment, Thai leaders' responsiveness to US political and economic interests may be reduced as they try to balance the competing demands of their supporters within the Army, the parties, and the bureaucracy. It is already clear that the civilians who now control economic policy, such as Finance Minister Sommai, do not always see eye to eye with US policymakers. For example, in early 1985, tariff increases affecting US goods shipped to Thailand touched off a dispute among the Finance Ministry, the Foreign Ministry, and the United States; so far the Finance Ministry has prevailed and the tariffs have remained. The United States, which has traditionally cultivated senior military men, may have to develop closer contacts with Cabinet appointees and bureaucrats such as Sommai. [redacted] 25X1 25X1 25X1 25X1 25X1

We also believe that the US-Thai security relationship could become less warm. [redacted] younger Thai officers lack their seniors' broad experience with US training and military cooperation in the field. [redacted] their outlook on defense matters has become more nationalistic and 25X1 25X1 25X1 25X1

somewhat parochial. For their part, as civilian politicians and technocrats have improved their position in recent years, they appear to be more willing to question US diplomacy in Southeast Asia and US trade policy. Although we are confident that Bangkok will remain a US ally, this combination of factors could result in a more distant relationship, marked by criticism of the United States on some issues by Thai leaders at home, and reduced willingness to support US positions in international forums.

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